DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 009 CE 048 435

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TITLE A Response to Life Transitions: The Preparation of Adult Educators.
PUB DATE Oct 87
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Washington, DC, October 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Adult Educators; Continuing Education; Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Midlife Transitions; Student Attitudes; *Summer Programs; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Chautauquas

ABSTRACT

A study examined the life transitions of adult educators and their perceptions toward a summer university program. The Summer Chautauqua Program was conducted to model program evaluation techniques for students of adult and continuing education, to provide data for program planners relative to the maintenance and revision of the summer program, and to attempt to substantiate currently accepted understanding of why adults pursue or resume formal learning efforts. The program involved a two-week, intensive format; pre-class assignments; planned out-of-class activities; considerable in-class discussion; and a variety of other features. Study participants were divided into two random groups with each group receiving a separate questionnaire. One questionnaire pertained to the summer program and the other pertained to the general program of studies in adult and continuing education. Results showed relatively high ratings for all aspects of the summer program. The term of greatest preference for enrollment in courses was summer; winter was the term of lowest preference. Over 50 percent of the respondents indicated that one reason for enrolling in courses in adult and continuing education was to assist in some life transition or change. Teaching principles that emerged from this study included opportunity for student input, quality of instruction, opportunity for study interaction, clarity of program information, and supportive out-of-class activities. (YLB)

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A Response to Life Transitions: The Preparation of Adult Educators

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Introduction

The life transitions of adult educators and their perceptions toward a summer university program are presented in this study. The program involved a number of unique features including a two week intensive format, pre-class assignments, planned out-of-class activities, considerable in-class discussion, and a variety of other features. The study participants were divided into two random groups with each group receiving a separate questionnaire. One questionnaire was identified as specifically pertaining to the summer program and the other was identified as pertaining to the general program of studies in adult and continuing education. The study was conducted in order to model program evaluation techniques for students of adult and continuing education, to provide data for program planners relative to the maintenance and revision of the unique summer program, and to attempt to substantiate currently accepted understandings of why adults pursue or resume formal learning efforts.

A Special University Program

During the summer of 1983 the Faculty of the Program of Studies in Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) at Michigan State University inaugurated a special summer program. Called the Summer Chautauqua Program, a series of academic courses not available during the regular academic year was offered. These courses were designed to be offered in a two week format instead of the usual five week summer session. Each two week session included three to five different courses.

The name "Chautauqua" was deliberately selected to represent an adult-focused instructional program that would extend beyond the normal expectations of a graduate course with an enriched environment for broadly-focused learning. The students were asked to pre-register for the program so that pre-class readings could be distributed to them so they could begin their study prior to the course meeting for the first time. Additionally, a variety of special activities of both a social and a learning nature were built into the two week experience. Care was taken to build an identity for the entire program, and to reduce identities of individual classes, so that the students would develop a sense of participation in something unique and special. In more recent years each two week session has included a special one-day workshop so that all of the students from the different Summer Chautauqua Program classes could meet and learn together.

As the program began in 1983 it soon became apparent that a number of special needs of adult students were being met. The compressed time frame provided an opportunity for many part-time students to be full-time for a short period. Married students moved onto the campus for a two week session and were able to become very immersed in their academic work due to the lack of family and professional interruptions. There seemed to be excellent use of the library and various other study opportunities along with a variety of social and cultural activities. Some of these were provided specifically by the faculty of the Summer Chautauqua Program, and others were part of the

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normal university schedule. The Summer Chautauqua Program has become a regular part of the adult and continuing education graduate program at MSU summer offering of the ACE faculty.

Examining the Program

The faculty of the Summer Chautauqua Program soon recognized the power of the program through the insights that they developed of the students. Problems and dilemmas from the "real world" of the students often became major areas of focus and reference in the classes. Due to the uniqueness of the academic setting and the intensity of the experience, a number of student characteristics became apparent that were seldom noticed in the more traditional graduate class setting. A number of questions emerged that became the basis of a large scale study. The following questions were those that focused specifically on the aspect of life transitions.

- What were the specific program elements of the Chautauqua Program that made it responsive to the adult students?
- Were life transitions a major factor in the decision of the adult students to attend the program? In what areas were these life transitions?
- Though the faculty felt strongly about the program, would the students identify the Chautauqua Program as a key part of their graduate study? How could this be studied so that the students would not be lead in their responses?

Methodology

Data for the study were collected during the winter academic quarter of 1986.

Population The population for the study consisted of all former participants in the three years that the summer program had been offered. In those cases in which a student had attended more than one year, duplication was avoided and the student was only counted once. This yielded a total of 234 subjects for the study.

Group Assignment The entire population was used for the study. However, a split-half technique was employed whereby each member of the population was randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group received a different questionnaire.

Instrumentation Two separate questionnaire instruments were developed for assessing the reactions of the two halves of the population. "Instrument A - Chautauqua" clearly stated to the respondent that it was an attempt to follow-up on the summer program experience and asked specific questions about the program. "Instrument B - General" did not in any way identify the summer program and asked more general questions about courses in adult and continuing education at Michigan State University. It allowed the respondent to identify the special program if the respondent so desired rather than as a function of the instrument. It was hoped that Instrument A would give specific reactions to the summer program and Instrument B would support the importance of the summer program through non-prompted reactions.

Data Analysis Primary data analysis was done through frequency tabulations since the entire population was used thereby negating the use of inferential statistics. In addition, it was hoped that the simplistic form of analysis would model for program planners an easy way to collect and analyze data.

Adult Life Transitions

The development of unique programs to better respond to the needs of adult students is a major undertaking of most adult educational programs. Apps reports:

> "Many institutions have begun extended timetable programs, an approach that means offering regular college courses late in the afternoon and in the evening. Several institutions have taken regular courses and offered them in a weekend format, again to encourage the attendance of the older, returning students." (Apps, 1981, pg. 35)

But the development of unique programs must be founded on some meaningful aspect for the adult learner and their approach to learning. Such an aspect can serve as an organizing force within the program and provide a basis for making program decisions. Wladkowski (1985) suggests that readiness to learn is tied to a need to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems. This becomes a key concern when dealing with groups of adult learners who can be expected to have similar tasks and problems. The adult student population for the Summer Chautauqua Program, however, is diverse in background and experience with a large repertoire of unique and different problems. As such, real-life tasks and problems do not provide the necessary organizer for program development in this case.

The area that became apparent as a possible organizer for program decisions for the Chautauqua Summer Program was that of life transitions and change. Weathersby and Tarule identify the concept of life transitions as an area that is beginning to be examined through interdisciplinary research. In defining transitions, they state:

> "Transitions take place in at least three ways: moving through time periods in the lifespan; changing roles; and through the events that mark transition points. Very generally, transitions from one period to the next can be due to biology, social roles, career and work, history, or the inner meanings of life events. They may be evident to others or remain unnoticed, although still dramatic, such as losing one's career aspirations. They may be sudden, or more likely cumulative. Transitions may be simultaneous...No matter how transitions are defined, coping with them provides an occasion for learning. (Weathersby and Tarule, 1980, pg.10)

Elias supports the idea of using life transitions as a basis for program development when he writes that "it is the change events or transitions of adulthood that are of importance to adult educators." (Elias, 1982, pg. 104) Certainly this message is strongly presented within the curriculum of adult education graduate programs, but it is not always present as an organizing factor in actually building the academic program.

Weathersby and Tarule in discussing the implications of adult development for the practice of adult education in higher education describe two major implications of knowledge of adult development. One is the use of adult development information as meaningful course content for the adult learner. And the "second major outcome of research on adult development is to make us more conscious of the role that education and educational institutions can play as supportive environments for individuals in life transitions." (Weathersby and Tarule, 1980, pg.44)

It was felt that the Summer Chautauqua Program, through is design and operation, was providing a focus on life transitions and change. And, as such, it would be seen by the students as a major feature of the program. It was hoped that this would be supported through this study. It was assumed

that the adult students in the program were similar to the adults described by Knox:

> "Throughout adulthood people confront major change events such as shifts in family composition, job changes, and physical disabilities. Practitioners can help adults make these adjustments by understanding the personal changes that are likely, developing realistic and constructive attitudes toward the resultant problems and opportunities, acquiring the needed understanding and competence, and arranging for supportive services. (Knox, 1977, pg. 390)

Results

In this section the data are reported from selected items on the two instruments.

A total of 134 (52%) of the prior Summer Chautauqua Program participants completed and returned the questionnaires. It was felt that this number provided a sufficient data base and there was no need for follow-up to prompt additional responses. Of those responding, 63 (47%) completed "Instrument A - Chautauqua" and 71 (53%) completed "Instrument B - General."

"Instrument A - Chautauqua" respondents were asked to rate ten different aspects of the summer program on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Table 1 summarizes these responses.

Table 1 - Ratings of Program Aspects

Aspect	Score*
1. Opportunity for student input	4.71
2. Quality of instruction	4.54
3. Involvement with other adult educators	4.49
4. Opportunity for networking	4.21
5. Clarity of course objectives	4.13
6. Clarity of pre-program information	4.08
7. New information, methods, techniques	4.05
8. Pre-class assignments	3.95
9. Outside of class activities	3.93
10. Methods of evaluating student performance	3.90

All aspects received relatively high scores with the lowest aspect receiving a score of 3.90. Of those aspects receiving the highest scores, three of the top four indicate qualities of involvement/participation.

"Instrument B - General" respondents were asked to indicate the term or terms during which they preferred to take adult and continuing education courses. Table 2 summarizes these responses.

Table 2 - Term Preference for Enrollment in Courses

Term Preferred	Number Indicating Preference
Summer	47 (34%)
Fall	33 (24%)
Spring	30 (22%)
Winter	17 (12%)
No preference	11 (8%)
Omitted	1 (.07%)

* "Score" is derived as an arithmetic mean of the weighted ratings where each rating of "1" receives a score of "1", each rating of "2" receives a score of "2", etc.

As can be expected, Winter term, with the potential for bad weather, was the term of lowest preference. This is due in large part to the great number of respondents who are not resident on the campus but must drive a distance to take courses. The term of greatest preference was summer term. This strongly supports the non-prompted response of the Summer Chautauqua Program being a very popular offering.

Both "Instrument A - Chautauqua" and "Instrument B - General" respondents were asked to indicate if one reason for enrolling in courses in adult and continuing education was to assist in some life transition or change. Thirty (52.4%) of the "Instrument A - Chautauqua" respondents indicated "YES" and 37 (53.6%) of the "Instrument B - General" respondents indicated "YES." Those respondents that indicated "YES" were asked to described the life transitions/changes. The categorization of their responses is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Life Transitions and Change as Reasons for Enrolling in Courses

Reason	A Respondents	B Respondents	Combined
1.Career changes	27 (85%)	32 (76%)	59 (80%)
2.Personal life changes			
a.Family/Parent Role	2 (6%)	2 (5%)	4 (5%)
b.Marriage/Divorce	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	2 (3%)
c.Change residence	- -	1 (2%)	1 (1%)
d.Time of life	2 (6%)	6 (14%)	8 (11%)
TOTAL	32 (100%)	42 (99%)	74 (100%)

The data regarding life transitions and change as a basis for taking academic courses is very consistent with the literature in adult education. In addition, Table 3 indicates that career changes are by far the greatest transition/change that the respondents see as the basis for the involvement in academic programs. There is little difference seen by those who were prompted to describe their involvement in only the summer program and those respondents not so prompted.

Implications for Practice

Apps (1981) suggests nine teaching principles that emerged from his study of adult learners returning to higher education.

1. Know your students
2. Use student experience as class content
3. Tie theory to practice
4. Provide a climate for learning
5. Offer a variety of formats
6. Offer a variety of techniques
7. Provide feedback
8. Help students find resources
9. Keep out-of-class contacts

These principles also have utility when seen within a program development perspective. A number of these principles were supported through this study.

If a similar listing of program principles were to be developed as an outcome of this study they would include:

1. Opportunity for student input (so that the students can feel that they have some say in the ongoing operation of the program)

2. Quality of instruction (content and process - so that learning time is not wasted)

3. Opportunity for student interaction (so that networks and associations between students can be developed for future learning)

4. Clarity of program information (to allow students the basis for making their decision on whether or not to participate)

5. Supportive out-of-class activities (that provide an enriching environment and a learning atmosphere for the program)

In 1988 the Summer Chautauqua Program will be offered for the sixth year. During this period the program has continued to attract large enrollments. The focus on life transitions and change continues to be a key organizing aspect of the program. A number of spin-offs have been created and/or enhanced because of the program. This has included a monthly weekend "extern" program during the regular school year, a special summer session in Europe, and an invitational international conference on campus. The relationships developed between the students, and between the students and the faculty have had very positive carry-over to the regular academic year program. It would seem that the Summer Chautauqua Program has been a vehicle to allow the Program of Studies in Adult and Continuing Education to accommodate it's own transition and change.

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